

Bohai 2013 Update 4 –

Well, as is often the case here in Bohai, a few days of good scanning is preceded by a much less productive period. Often this cycle seems to be linked to the changing tides, the unpredictable birds or a combination of factors but this time it has lasted a little longer and been that little bit more frustrating. Apart from this setback, the birding has been good, the weather has been tolerable and we enjoyed some extra company as Chris joined the team and Theunis visited for a few days.

As suggested above, things haven't gone quite as smoothly since the last update. A normal day on the sea wall saw us waiting patiently as the tide receded but birds didn't arrive. 30,000 Red Knot had decreased to just a few thousand overnight! It seemed a little early for them to be heading north so the search was on. Over the course of the next few days we checked all the regular sites along the coast at all stages of the tide but came up with relatively small numbers, a few hundred here, a thousand there. After a few frustrating days we saw a distant flock on the mudflats north of Beipu and after a few days of exploration and experimentation we got close enough for some scanning. Unfortunately the area they are favouring is not the easiest to access. The mud here is very soft so walking out is off the agenda and during our last visit we were approached by site security. Through hand gestures they seemed to be asking us to leave but we feigned ignorance until they got fed up and left us to it! The behaviour and favoured feeding areas of the Red Knot usually changes a little year to year but this is the first time they have done this and we are left hoping the birds will return to Nanpu. Even so bird numbers seem noticeably down on previous years with many flocks dominated by Curlew Sandpiper rather than Knot.



Red Knot & fisherman (*Adrian Boyle*)

Due to this unfortunate change of behaviour from the birds, our flag and band totals are a little down on what we were hoping but there are still 3 weeks left and everything to play for. Recent highlights have included an increase of Broome birds with more colour bands and flags recorded daily, particularly on Red Knot but also on Curlew Sandpipers and a few new Bar-tailed Godwit. Flagged Broad-billed Sandpipers included an individual from Taiwan, several from Thailand and one bird from Broome. We have now seen 3 Red Knot from New Zealand, 1 Red Knot and 2 Great Knots from Broome all with Geo-locators. A new Grey Plover from Hong Kong was seen as well as a few Curlew Sandpipers.

Also, if anyone was still wondering about the Curlew Sandpiper with a cable tie that was mentioned in the last update then we have the answer. It appears to one of 18 birds caught at Wonorejo, Indonesia in September 2007. Thanks for the info Clare!



Left: Broad-billed Sandpiper from Taiwan. Right: Dunlin from Sakhalin (*Adrian Boyle*)

Our last record of Nordmann's Greenshank was three birds at Nanpu on 14th. We suspect they have left as this last date is consistent with previous year's observations. Several Grey-tailed Tattler were seen and a Grey-headed Lapwing on the 14th is so far our only record of the year. Away from the mudflats the saltpans have been very productive. Large numbers of birds use these shallow lagoons and during mid-May they often hold more birds than the coastline but with a very different species composition. Later this year a PhD project at Beijing Normal University will begin studying the birds within the saltpans. This will complement our (primarily mudflat-focused) work, and add to the overall understanding of this vitally important staging site. To illustrate the importance of the area - in a single salt pond, which measured approximately 3km², we counted over 92 500 birds! About two thirds of these were Curlew Sandpiper with Red-necked Stint, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and 12 other species accounting for the rest. Tens of thousands of White-winged Terns are present in the area dipping and diving, picking at the surface of ponds throughout the complex. Overall, the sheer numbers and variety of birds throughout this small area is a spectacular sight. To lose it to 'development' would be a tragedy.



It's hard to get 93 000 birds in a photo but here are some of them... (*Adrian Boyle*)

Birding along the sea wall and regular trips to the local park produced a selection of good birds. A Swan Goose seen several times in the saltpans at Beipu is our first record in the area although the habitat, time of year and its approachability indicate it may not be in the best of health! A Little Owl sitting on a bare wall in the saltpans was another first and looked equally out of place. Black Drongo are seen regularly, the first Cuckoos started passing through and a Black-winged Cuckoo-shrike was in the park.



Swan Goose & Yellow-browed Bunting (*Adrian Boyle*)

As the *rogersi* Red Knot are starting to leave and new *piersmai* individuals are seen every day there are plenty more sightings to be had. Now we have a team of four full-time scanners for the next two weeks we just need some birds to cooperate!

Bohai Team 2013

Number bird species recorded so far in 2013	199
Number band/flag sightings so far in 2013 (+ number regions)	3018 (17)
Number NW Australia colour-band Sightings so far in 2013	208
Ratio Red Knot ssp. <i>rogersi</i> : <i>piersmai</i> in last 10 days	8874:5348 - 62% <i>rogersi</i>



Chris discovering the softness (and deep cleansing qualities?!?) of the mud north of Beipu.

To learn more about our work here as well as see reports and updates from previous field seasons in Bohai check out the Global Flyway Network website ... <http://globalflywaynetwork.com.au/>





Above: Asian Dowitchers. Below: White-winged Black Tern (*Adrian Boyle*)

